When Did an Increase in Efficiency Become a Bad Thing?

from Kevin Williamson in National Review, The Social Machine:

> *American factories are one of the wonders of the world, and, in spite of what President Donald Trump, Senator Bernie Sanders, and other lightly informed populists claim, they are humming. U.S. manufacturing output is about 68 percent higher today in real terms (meaning inflation-adjusted terms) than it was before NAFTA was enacted; manufacturing output is about double in real terms what it was in the 1980s and more than three times what it was in the 1950s. As our factories grow more efficient, output per man-hour has grown, too, which is what troubles the populists and demagogues: Our factories employ a much smaller share of the U.S. work force than they once did.*

> *But it is important to keep in mind: That growth in manufacturing output did not come in spite of the decline in factory employment but partly because of it. Automation not only makes current production more efficient but also makes it easier to improve efficiency in the future: More heavily automated factory processes are much easier to upgrade than are those heavily dependent on human labor.*